

# OpenTheo

## July 23rd: 1 Samuel 13 & 2 Corinthians 6

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Saul's first fall. Paul's summons to separateness.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

1 Samuel 13. Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel, Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin, and the rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent.

Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines.

And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops, like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-Avon.

When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble, for the people were hard pressed, the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns. And some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.

And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him.

Samuel said, What have you done? And Saul said, When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord. So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, You have done foolishly.

You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue.

The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you. And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army.

They went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Gibeah of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Micmash.

And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned towards Ophrah, to the land of Sheol. Another company turned towards Beth Horon, and another company turned towards the border that looks down on the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears. But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle. And the charge was two thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads.

So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan. But Saul and Jonathan his son had them. And the

garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Micmash.

The beginning of 1 Samuel chapter 13 presents us with a knotty textual question. If you compare different English translations you will notice that the years mentioned in verse 1 vary from one to another. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the version in the ESV, which seems to have the strongest textual case in its favour, is decidedly odd.

It employs a formula familiar from the books of the kings and elsewhere. Some was X years old when he became king and he reigned for Y years. However here it says he lived for one year and then he reigned for two years.

What are we to make of this? We should probably start with the second number. In Acts chapter 13 verse 21 the apostle Paul declares that Saul reigned for 40 years, a number that's also given to us in Josephus' antiquities. So it is difficult to argue that Saul literally only reigned for two years, even if we were able to imagine the events of his reign described in 1 Samuel occurring within such a brief span of time, which we can't.

The second number might arguably refer to the number of years that Saul reigned before the events of chapter 13 occurred. That is how the ESV takes it. Another possibility is that the years refer to the period of time during which Saul was the divinely sanctioned monarch.

Some, such as David Toshio Samora, argue that the expression should be read as an ironic one. Two years should be understood to mean a few years, in a more indefinite sense. The meaning might be similar to a non-literal use of the term a couple of, which can occasionally be used as an intentional, extreme understatement.

For example, if a criminal spoke of having a couple of run-ins with the police, rather than as a literal reference to two years exactly. The purpose here then would be to discount the significance of the years of Saul's reign. They can be passed over lightly.

While he may have been on the throne for two decades by this time, to the author it is but a few years. Another possibility is that both of the numbers of the years were intentionally left blank in the original and have been subsequently filled in by scribal copiers. Kyle Mac Carter is one who suggests this.

What difference might any of this make? One difference is the age of Saul when he came to the throne. If Saul reigned for 40 years, and the events of this chapter occur two years into his reign, then Saul must have been in his late thirties at the least when he became king, as Jonathan must have been at least 20, old enough to lead a thousand men into battle. Another related difference is our understanding of the age of David relative to that of Jonathan.

In 2 Samuel 5 verse 4 we are told that David was 30 years old when he began to reign. This would make Jonathan about 30 years older than David if 1 Samuel 13 refers to

events that occurred two years into a 40 year reign. This also leaves us with the question of how Saul could be described as being, more literally, a son of one year.

That expression is most commonly found in reference to sacrificial animals. Peter Lighthouse suggests that this might refer to the fact that Saul received a sort of adoption by Samuel and became a new man in chapters 9 and 10. The suggestion then would be that this occurred one year before Saul became king.

If this were the case, some comparisons between Saul and an unblemished sacrificial animal at the time of his installation into the kingly office might be invited. It is not uncommon for numbers to have been altered in biblical texts, and there are a number of places in scripture where we have different numbers preserved in different textual traditions. There are also places where the numbers seem to be wrong, unless we are missing something about the technical meaning of certain terms.

For instance, common sense would seem to exclude the possibility that the Philistines actually had 30,000 chariots, as mentioned in verse 5. Other translations have 3,000 or three thousands, which is more plausible. Perhaps even more so if we read thousand as thousands, referring to a military contingent, which wouldn't necessarily contain literally a thousand chariots. My position has changed on this question in the last year.

I think it is far more plausible to believe that the events of 1 Samuel 13 occurred at least a couple of decades into Saul's reign. It seems less likely that Saul was nearly 40 when he became king, and still fighting in his late 70s at the end of the book. Also that Jonathan was over 30 years older than David.

The plausibility of a dating much later in Saul's reign is further strengthened by verse 14. It might be a bit strange to speak of the Lord having sought out and commanded a man after his own heart to be king instead of Saul if David hadn't even been born yet. For these reasons, mostly considerations of plausibility internal to the narrative itself, I am inclined to believe that the numbers given are incorrect and have either been changed from those in the original or added to an original text that had no numbers.

Returning to the narrative, Saul here might be establishing a sort of standing army, divided into two companies, 2,000 with Saul in Micmash and the remaining 1,000 with Jonathan in Gibeah, Saul's home city. This is the first reference to Jonathan in 1 Samuel. We aren't yet informed that he is Saul's son.

Jonathan successfully defeats the Philistine garrison at Geba, which will later provoke a massive Philistine counter-offensive. Israel hears of Saul's victory, but also of the fact that Israel was now facing the prospect of fierce Philistine vengeance. We might recall the way that the Israelites opposed Moses when Pharaoh increased their burdens, or the Judahites sought to give Samson to the Philistines due to their fear of reprisals.

The prospect of remaining submissive to an oppressive power may be a more welcome one than the prospect of a failed rebellion leading to them being crushed. The people are now summoned to join Saul at Gilgal. Israel is trapped.

Jonathan's actions have incited the Philistines' ire, and the Philistines now retaliate with devastating force. The people hide themselves in caves, holes, tombs and cisterns, much as they had in the time of the Midianites prior to Gideon's deliverance. Others flee to the Transjordan, leaving the Promised Land.

And Saul camps at Gilgal, the site where they first camped in the land, when they entered under Joshua. However, the people following him are exceedingly fearful. They are supposed to be the true recipients of the promise of the land, yet it is the Philistines who are like the sand of the seashore multitude.

Saul had been instructed to wait at Gilgal for seven days until Samuel came. This was the time that Samuel had appointed. And this recalls the instruction given to Saul in chapter 10, verses 7 to 8. Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.

This instruction seemed to refer to the initial installation of Saul as king, which occurred at Gilgal at the end of chapter 11. However, the instruction to wait for seven days here recalls that earlier instruction, and contrasts Saul's unfaithfulness here with his previous faithfulness. Note that there he had become a new man, near the Philistine garrison at Gibeah, and then been instructed to go to Gilgal.

Saul waits for seven days. It isn't entirely clear whether the seven days have passed, or it is on the seventh day at this point, but he loses his nerve when Samuel does not turn up. He then takes matters into his own hand, and offers the burnt offering and the peace offerings himself.

Why is this so serious? First, Saul is acting independently of the prophet Samuel, the one who declares God's word to him, and represents the Lord's authority over him. The whole kingdom depended upon the king's submission to the word of the Lord, that the Lord was the true king of Israel, and Saul was under him. The king's heeding of the voice of the prophet was of paramount importance.

Second, it's possible that Saul here assumes the prerogative to play the part of a priest himself, offering the sacrifices himself. On the other hand, it's possible that this is just a shorthand for saying that Saul commanded the sacrifices to be made. In the next chapter we discover that Ahijah, the son of Ahitab, the brother of Ichabod, the priest of

the Lord, is camped with Saul, and presumably he would have performed such sacrifices for Saul.

Had Saul performed the sacrifices himself, he would have been claiming authority over the worship of Israel in a way that he did not possess. I think the most likely issue here is his disobedience to Samuel, and the fact that as the king he rejects the word of the prophet. Samuel's confrontation with Saul might remind us of the confrontation with Adam after his sin in the garden, or Moses' confrontation with Aaron after his sin with the golden calf, another instance when someone assumed the right to reorder Israel's worship out of expediency, fear, and impatience.

Saul's response is like Adam and Aaron's, full of excuses. Saul has sinned against the Lord and against Samuel. He has jettisoned their fatherly authority over him.

Had Saul been faithful, his kingdom would have endured. However, because of his unfaithfulness, Saul would have no enduring dynasty, and his kingdom would end with him. The Lord would seek out a faithful replacement for Saul, a man after his own heart, which proves to be David.

It is likely that there was still opportunity for Saul to repent at this point, and for the blessing to be restored to him. On occasions we have these declarations of definite judgement in scripture, but the Lord relents from judgement when the people repent. The city of Nineveh's repentance at the preaching of Jonah is a good example of this.

In Saul we find a compelling and deeply observant portrait of how power can change someone, even transforming what were once virtues into vices. In this chapter we see a hairline fracture in Saul's character start to expand. His characteristic modesty, lack of grand ambition, reluctance to assume power, and his self-doubt express themselves in fear, loss of nerve, and rashness.

Later they will develop into a growing insecurity and paranoia about his possible replacement. Saul will become desperately fixated upon holding on to his power. His whole mindset gets transformed by power.

Once he has tasted power and its potential, and what it means for his identity and legacy, he becomes defined and consumed by it. Power holds him more than he holds power. Saul's insecurities drive his sinful actions.

His men were abandoning him, and rather than trust the Lord, who defeated the Midianites, who had covered the land like a locust horde through 300 men with Gideon, Saul has 600, he lost his nerve and acted rashly. Saul's fears start to define him, when what he needed was faith in the Lord. A fearful and insecure person wielding power can be a very dangerous thing.

Saul decamps from Gilgal and joins with Jonathan and his company at Giba, the

Philistines' camp nearby in Micmash. We should note the locations of the camps here are directly reversed from the camps at the beginning of the chapter, as are the relative fortunes of the two forces. The Philistines now divide their forces into three raiding parties, much as Gideon had divided his forces in Judges.

They send out military units in different directions to quell the rebellion, while Saul and his men seemingly are unable to do anything. Israel's situation is dire. They are without weaponry, as the Philistines have a monopoly on ironworking.

Only Saul and Jonathan have weapons. Israel had first entered the land under Joshua in the Late Bronze Age. One of the major concerns then, which continued to be a concern, was the military technology of the chariot, which enabled certain Canaanite groups to dominate the plains.

Now, in the first part of the Iron Age, military dominance depends heavily upon iron smelting and blacksmiths, and the Philistines effectively control access to that technology. An Israelite who wants even an agricultural tool to be sharpened will have to go to the Philistines and pay them an exorbitant rate for them to do so. This description of the Philistines' dominance, however, sets things up for Jonathan's incredible victory in the chapter that follows.

A question to consider, what can we learn from Saul about the relationship between courage and faithfulness? 2 Corinthians chapter 6 Therefore go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing. Then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. In the previous chapter, Paul spoke of God working through himself and his companions.

In verse 20, Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Now in chapter 6 he continues that point, appealing to the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain.

God's saving righteousness that restores and sets things to rights is at work in and through Paul, and Paul is concerned that the Corinthians received the grace of God in a way that proves fruitful. He quotes a verse from a passage concerning salvation in Isaiah chapter 49 verses 7-13. Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and His Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers, Kings shall see and rise, princes and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.

Thus says the Lord, In a time of favour I have answered you, in a day of salvation I have helped you. I will keep you, and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, Come out, to those who are in darkness, appear. They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be

their pasture, they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene. Sing for joy, O heavens, and exalt, O earth, break forth, O mountains, into singing, for the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted.

God's long-awaited righteousness has come near for the Corinthians too, and they ought to seize the day of salvation, not letting it pass them by. The fullness of time has come, God has sent his Son, and people must respond. Entrusted with this ministry, Paul has been careful to present no obstacle or offence.

He has, as he argues in 1 Corinthians, become all things to all men, to ensure that responding favourably to the message is as easy as it could possibly be. No hindrance or discouragement is presented by Paul in his speech or his conduct. Paul follows this by presenting a list of hardships that he endures in his ministry.

He has willingly taken these trials upon himself for the sake of his calling. Once again he is presenting a portrait of the character of his ministry, a character that befits the message and the master that he serves. The actual list of hardships is carefully structured.

It begins with a list of situations and circumstances in which he has undertaken his service, in verses 4 and 5. In verses 6 and 7 he describes the manner of his ministry in these situations and circumstances, and the virtues and the means that have distinguished it. In verse 8 he begins to list the extremes of the responses through which he has remained steadfast. And from the end of verse 8 until the end of verse 10, the list explores the paradoxical character of Christian ministry, largely along the fault line of the inner self-outer self division that he has discussed earlier.

Paul presented another hardship list back in chapter 4 verses 7 to 12. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. In that passage it was the countervailing power of the life of Christ against the death and suffering of the body that was foregrounded.



Towards the end of the hardship list in chapter 6, it is the paradoxical forces that Paul and his fellow ministers carry within themselves that is most apparent. Paul experiences the power of these immense and opposing forces, the fault line between two ages, within his very self. Death and life are not merely neatly divided between inner and outer selves, but are experienced within a single person.

Sorrow and joy, poverty and immense wealth, life and death are simultaneous presences in the life of the faithful minister. This hardship list continues Paul's defence of his ministry that he has been developing through the letter to this point. It demonstrates that Paul's mettle as a minister has been tested.

It also manifests once again the way that Paul's existence and self-understanding consistently draw from the horizon of the age to come. Paul now addresses the Corinthians directly, as Corinthians for the first time. Paul is making explicit the intent of his argument at this point.

Throughout the letter, Paul's desire is for the Corinthians to bring him joy. His heart yearns for them, and the pain of the tensions that have clearly come between them weigh very heavily upon him. He expresses his affection to them as a father would to his children.

Indeed, as it was through Paul that they first received the Gospel, it is appropriate for him to address them in such an intimate manner. He has unburdened his heart to them, and his heart is wide open to them, earnestly desiring to receive their love back in turn. However, he fears that they have closed their hearts to him, or at least restricted their affections towards him.

He beseeches them to open up their hearts to him again. The concluding verses of this chapter have provoked some debate among commentators. Several regard them as a non-Pauline insertion in the context.

There is a seeming jolt between verse 13 and verse 14, and if we were to remove the verses from chapter 6 verse 14 to chapter 7 verse 1, the text would flow very smoothly between those two points. Paul was just making a warm emotional appeal, an appeal to which he returns in chapter 7 verse 2, and then he moves into something more like a rebuke. Beyond the sudden transition are some features of this passage that suggest to some that it is non-Pauline.

There is some vocabulary that isn't found elsewhere in Paul. There is a chain of quotations, and whereas Paul will typically distinguish quotations within such a chain, here they are not so distinguished. Furthermore, the introductory expression, as God said, is used here, an expression that Paul doesn't use elsewhere.

Some have also claimed that there are tensions between the theological emphases of

this passage and those in Paul more generally. Others see it as an insertion in the context, but argue that it is from a lost Pauline text, perhaps the letter that he referred to in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 9 to 10. As Paul deals with a number of elements of this passage in 1 Corinthians, where he refers to being unequally yoked in marriage to unbelievers in chapter 7 verses 12 to 15, avoiding all communion with idols in chapters 8 to 10, and separating from immoral persons at the end of chapter 5, he might be clarifying this supposedly earlier letter, at least according to some commentators.

What are we to make of all of this? First, I think the argument for a Pauline insertion presents good arguments against the claim that the theology is non-Pauline. These verses comport very well with Paul's message elsewhere. One of the problems with the theory of an insertion is that it fails to give good explanations of how and why it came to be inserted at this particular point.

The arguments from unusual terminology are also not as strong as they might initially appear. There are plenty of passages of undisputed Pauline origin where rare or unique terminology, what scholars called hapax legomena, are used. Other arguments are weaker on closer examination too.

Paul's manner of quotation is not uniform but shows considerable variety. For instance, in Romans chapter 3 verses 10 to 18, he quotes a chain of Old Testament texts. He also uses expressions similar to as God said elsewhere.

Nor are seeming digressions unknown in Pauline epistles. David Garland argues that what we have here is a pattern of argumentation that we also find elsewhere in Paul. In Romans chapter 3 verses 10 to 18, a catena of citations concludes a section of Paul's argument running from chapter 1 verse 18 to chapter 3 verse 20.

Furthermore, he observes that the order of Paul's argument here can be loosely paralleled with the order of the argument in 1 Corinthians chapters 4 to 6. If this is not an insertion then, we must give an account of what it is doing here. I find Garland's suggestion here quite convincing. From chapter 2 to chapter 6, Paul has been defending his ministry and the manner of his addressing the Corinthians.

The issues raised in these verses are issues that are clearly issues of great concern in Corinth as we have already seen in 1 Corinthians. He has written a painful letter to them and there have been tensions between him and the Corinthians. Idle food and sexual immorality were manifestly problems in Corinth but it seems that the practices hadn't been effectively rejected.

The weak among the Corinthians weren't a party that were presenting a case for themselves so much as they were spiritually vulnerable persons in danger of being wounded by the liberties that the strong were taking. Paul had dealt with these issues in his first letter but it may well be that his arguments weren't heeded by some, perhaps

leading to direct conflict with a leading member, the wrong that was done that he refers to, and the painful letter that Paul had to write. Now, having laid out a defence of his apostleship and its ethos, opened his heart to the Corinthians, expressed his deep love and concern for them, and his greater confidence in their positive response, he expresses his fundamental case in a pithy and forceful manner once again.

The point of these verses then is to express the sharpest possible antithesis between the people of God and the world. The people of God must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Here Paul seems to be referring to more than just marriage, although marriage would also be in view.

It is likely that eating food sacrificed to idols at shared feasts might be the background here. Deuteronomy 22, verse 10 is the underlying text. You shall not plough with an ox and a donkey together.

This is a symbolic commandment talking about the need for a difference and division to be maintained between the people of God and those who are unbelievers. Paul elaborates this antithesis in a series of oppositions expressed in strong rhetorical questions. The difference between righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, believers, unbelievers, the temple of God and idols.

And then he elaborates upon the fact that the people of God are the temple of God, the place where God dwells. And this is where he begins his series of quotations. Leviticus chapter 26, verses 11 to 12.

I will make my dwelling among you and my soul shall not abhor you and I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people. God has set his people apart and they must live accordingly. Isaiah chapter 52, verse 11.

Depart, depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing, go out from the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord. Salvation has come near and the people of God must separate themselves as God comes on the scene. Ezekiel chapter 20, verse 34.

I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out. God is going to deliver his people from the nations among which they have been scattered. And when he does that he's going to deal with the unfaithful in their midst so they must be careful.

Ezekiel chapter 20, verse 38. I will purge out the rebels from among you and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn but they shall not enter the land of Israel.

Then you will know that I am the Lord. He also quotes from the first part of 2 Samuel

chapter 7, verse 14. I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.

He joins that with the teaching of Deuteronomy chapter 32, verses 18 to 19. You were unmindful of the rock that bore you and you forgot the God who gave you birth. The Lord saw it and spurned them because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters.

Paul is alluding to a wide selection of scripture here, all testifying to the same fundamental truth, the divide between the righteous and the wicked that must be established and maintained, especially in the face of the coming judgment of God. However, it is important to recognize that it all ends on a strong note of promise, a point that Paul will underline in the first verse of chapter 7. A question to consider, how do we display the holy separateness to which scripture calls us?